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Ralph Winter, Patrick Johnstone, Tim Lewis, and *Mission Frontiers* magazine

From: _____

The Global Leadership Team of the World Evangelical Alliance, Missions Commission

Subject: _____

Issues related to the "Third Call", an invitation to form a global fellowship of mission agency leaders [as presented in the May-June 2003 issue of *Mission Frontiers*]:

August 13, 2003

Dear Colleagues in global mission,

On behalf of the WEA Missions Commission (MC), we greet you in the Name of the Triune missionary God. We also write with a commitment to the unity of the Body of Christ, in this case as together we determine how to best serve the global mission movements "in every nation and to all nations" committed to full obedience to the full Great Commissions of Christ.

With this heart we engage in what we hope is a fruitful dialogue related to what is named the "Third Call"...

The MC Global Leadership Team discussed this past June some of the issues related to the proposed global inter-mission network of mission leaders. The following is an attempt to present some of the major concerns and questions that emerged. Answers to these will provide greater clarity as we move forward in mutual commitments to Christ and his global Church.

1. We were puzzled that while the major article on the topic in the May-June 2003 issue of *Mission Frontiers* was written by Patrick Johnstone, there seem to be substantial differences between his vision and that of Ralph Winter. It would be helpful to have this matter clarified. For us in the MC, the way forward is to work together in convergence instead of perpetuating differences or polarizing sodality and modality. We need to recognize the validity of both dimensions of the Church of Christ and encourage mutually enhancing relationships between the two. We all note and affirm the reality that a very substantial percentage of the mission movement in the South is church-driven, much more than in the North.

Ralph Winter's Response

Patrick and I have never talked together about this since Edinburgh 1980. Any convergence you see from his sincere thinking and mine is purely coincidental, and thus significant. There would have to be differences. There is a whole host of historical material in the *International Journal of Frontier Missions*. We sent out both the relevant issues of *Mission Frontiers* and *IJFM* to everyone who attended the Singapore 2002 conference last fall (where a global linkage of mission agencies surfaced as the highest-ranked concern)...

2. We wonder what type of a substantial, global needs analysis has been done for this proposed network that would establish its viability? How broad is the constituency that is truly calling for a new worldwide entity? There very well might be a global groundswell for it, and we would rejoice in it. But some of us were at the GCOWE 1997 meeting in Pretoria, South Africa and remember that one reason there was no groundswell to affirm the "Call" as expressed there was simply because the need for such was not shared widely by that very representative group of mission agency leadership.

Ralph Winter's Response

By 2010 there will have been 100 years of track record and thought behind this. Furthermore, the value of lots of things is not at the beginning recognized by groundswell awareness. The Singapore meeting did have a groundswell in this direction, however.... When the Pretoria meeting took place I don't recall that the issue ever came before the plenary, and there was no other opportunity for a follow-through structure for mission agencies even

though other tracks (like the Deans and Presidents of Seminaries) did form a follow-through structure. It is as though all the other interest tracks can fellowship on the world level, but when someone suggests that mission agencies do so, there is the outcry of division.

3. We wonder how this new network will relate to the established national and regional mission leader networks? This concerns us because it is very probable that a significant majority of the mission movements are already linked to both national and regional mission organizations, and hence to the WEA MC. Now they will have to respond to the invitation of the proposed "Third Call" and consider the investment of their limited resources for yet another new entity. In the words of Dr. K Rajendran of India: "This may divide the allegiance and the synergy effects simply because of slight differences. We feel that this is not helpful. The WEA MC has caught the imagination and built a tremendous forum of the newly emerged mission world and it is working hard to build a 'new' type of partnership between the 'older' and the 'newer' sending world. We cannot afford to dilute the energies of our colleagues around the world".

Within the MC network we work with some 40 national mission movements... Besides these national movements, we serve in partnership with regional mission bodies in the Caribbean, Latin America, Asia, Europe and Africa.

While membership categories vary widely, all include mission agencies (independent and denominational); many include a combination of missional churches, Christian aid and development agencies, mission support and resource providers, Bible and other theological schools that help train missionaries as well as dedicated missionary

training institutions, mobilizers, home mission agencies, research groups, communications bodies, funding agencies, member care groups, professors of missions, business associates with missional purpose, and other individuals.

We wish to avoid duplication, to strengthen but not overly-stretch the limited resources of existing national and regional mission movements. These national and regional mission bodies—representing missional modalities as well as sodalities—are working very hard to serve their members. If an additional component is to be birthed by the Spirit of God, it seems wisest to join forces with established networks and with creativity serve to strengthen them.

Ralph Winter's Response

It has already proven true that regional networks are helpful in addition to national networks, and in exactly the same sense so can global networks be helpful. In fact, the ethnic peoples of the world are rapidly becoming global, not just regional or national. No regional network can look efficiently with care on the global dispersion of Hindus, for example. ... As for the problem of dwindling resources, no one is suggesting the termination of the regional networks' existence on that ground. Perhaps once a global network of mission agencies is founded and is properly "docked" with the WEA Missions Commission, the Missions Commission can easily then say that it does now in fact convene meetings to which you don't need an invitation but can come simply because of the nature of the agency you represent.

4. It was rather perplexing to read of Patrick Johnstone's evaluation in the same issue of *Mission Frontiers* of the WEA Missions Commission as not relevant to the new network, particularly because "...it remains somewhat distant from the harvesters themselves. In fact, the Missions Commission is a very small body indeed, and is hardly able to be fully representative of mission agencies in global conference in more than a very general way." We wonder what sources led to these conclusions? Does this perspective fairly reflect the MC in its fullness? Might it not be

time for an updated understanding? Would wisdom not call us to contribute to strengthen and broaden the agenda of an established international mission network instead of attempting to start a new one?

Ralph Winter's Response

I will just ask to what extent the WEA Missions Commission has favored, fostered, or assisted either the Asia Missions Association or the Third World Missions Association. And has the Missions Commission encouraged into existence any national association of mission structures? I hope so. In that case a world-level association would be equally logical.

5. In what way would this network include the significant church-based (with all of its weaknesses and strengths) sending bodies? Again, it is vital to note that a very substantial percentage of the mission movement in the South is church-driven, much more than in the North with its traditions of entrepreneurship, individuality and organizational diversity.

Ralph Winter's Response

As I see it, whether a church or a para-church organization is seriously sending missionaries, there you find an "agency" of mission. Usually, though, whether a mega-congregation or more than one congregation unites in sending cross-cultural workers, a specialized structure eventually emerges. Those are the people, then, who need to interface with similarly responsible people.

6. We wonder if *Mission Frontiers* would be willing to dedicate an entire issue to report on the global outreach and impact of the WEA Missions Commission networks, as well as the outcomes of the consultation and the ten task forces/networks in Canada this past May 31-June 6.

Ralph Winter's Response

Absolutely. Across the years we have given whole issues to the AD2000 Movement and the Lausanne Committee and maybe even the former WEF. We would love to do it....

7. Finally and most seriously, we wish to invite you into a mission dialogue that seeks the highest good of the global mission movement. We do not wish to go down on record as a body that blocks this venture of the "Third Call", nor to attempt to monopolize. At the same time, the Missions Commission is committed to engaging in strategic collaborative ventures with other established or emerging bodies that desire to serve the worldwide mission movement. With that in mind, TIE (Tentmakers International Exchange) joined with the MC this past June. We have diverse "docking mechanisms" that allow full freedom and at the same time allow us to serve in convergence and not divergence. We simply want to avoid duplication and to foster convergence and synergy. We want to engage in a healthy process of exploration that includes some of the already established major players that would be directly affected by the current presentation of the "Third Call". In other words, the MC architecture is open.

Ralph Winter's Response

I treasure your magnanimous and magnificent statements of purpose. I join with you wholeheartedly in the very highest hopes for close fellowship and collaboration in the future of what many conceive to be the one missing piece in global mission strategy. (There are national, regional, and Third World networks of missions agencies, but none global.) What I hope will form is a modest entity in which all legitimate, serious, "frontier-aware" agencies of mission in the world can meet on an equal footing, and are all welcome (not needing to be invited by name) to participate and relate, in full and sympathetic fellowship with all regional and national entities.

It seems clear to me that the tentatively entitled "Global Network of Mission Agencies," if it is born (it has only been conceived at this point), would readily "dock" with the WEA Missions Commission as has TIE. Getting the job done requires a host of different kinds of structures and relationships. ☺